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ABSTRACT

Sociolinguistically oriented studies of the Chicano speech community cluster around two subject areas: (1) conversational code-switching, and (2) language loyalty and maintenance. Research representative of each of these areas is reviewed. It is felt that the large body of findings regarding the language use of the Chicanos have failed to take the form of a Chicano sociolinguistics because: (1) most studies of Chicano language usage have been done independently of each other, and (2) most studies show a lack of commitment between the researcher and the language community. The present study outlines what are considered to be vital elements for a Chicano sociolinguistic research program. Chicano sociolinguists need to take the linguistic needs of the Chicano community itself as a foundation for the development of a research program and strategy. The principal goal of a Chicano sociolinguistics research program should be to explore the consequences of involving the users of language in the scholarly process, not only as objects of research and planning, but as participants in those aspects of activities that are normally considered to lie within the province of the trained professional. (Author/CLK)

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Language in the Chicano Community: A Sociolinguistic Consideration*

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Paper read at the American Sociological Association Meeting, 9 September 77.

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The Chicano speech community[1] offers an excellent opportunity to investigate the kinds of questions that are current and important for sociolinguistics. With an estimated ten to twelve million speakers, it is easily the largest linguistic minority in North America. Yet, amazingly enough, little is known about the varieties of language used by Chicanos, the patterns of language use, attitudes towards particular varieties, the extent of language loyalty and maintenance, or for that matter, any other aspect of language within the group. This is true even though their principal language is Spanish which, in other areas, has a long history of scholarly interest.

The relatively few studies that have been carried out, though useful enough, are largely descriptions of local dialects which base their analyses on the deviations from standard, written Spanish. The vast majority have been done by white researchers many of whom have the barest knowledge of the communities in which they work, and even less of an interest in contributing to their betterment. An indication of the state of affairs in Chicano linguistics is that by far the most comprehensive work in this area was accomplished nearly sixty years ago by Aurelio Espinosa (1909,1911,1917).

1.1 Sociolinguistic Study of the Chicano Speech Community

Sociolinguistically-oriented studies of the Chicano speech community tend to cluster around either one of the following two subject areas: (a) the study of conversational code-switching - the juxtaposition of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems, or subsystems, within the same exchange; (b) the study of language loyalty and maintenance.[2] In the following pages we will briefly discuss some of the research representative for each of these dimensions.

1.1.1 Code-Switching

Sociolinguistic Constraints. This dimension of code-switching research

attempts to create a general framework for the discovery and analysis of rules for speaking, and their relationship to features of the social environment as they are related with face-to-face interaction (cf. Gumperz,1970). Operating with the concept of "communicative competence" (Hymes,1967), the recognition that speakers have the ability to use their their speech varieties for specific functions, social or linguistic, the sociolinguist seeks situations demanding rigid adherence to a code in order to isolate the features of the code.

Secondly, because the social value of language reveals itself in all manners of socially motivated behavior (cf. Pride,1971), the sociolinguist attempts to demonstrate that code-switching serves a social function. For instance, in their research on code-switching in the speech of California Chicanos, Gumperz & Hernandez (1969) found that whenever Chicano identity was an underlying theme, Spanish was used. Other studies of Chicano code-switching have described it as (a) a socio-political identity marker among Chicanos (McMenamin,1973); (b) the language of casual, intimate relationships between Chicanos (Timm,1975a); (c) the Chicano's way of signalling social distence from an Anglo role (Metcalf,1972); and (d) implying trust that the listener will not be offended by the mixture of the languages (Oliver,1972). Thus, among Chicanos, code-switching is clearly used as a verbal strategy for conveying social information.[3]

Linguistic Constraints. This other dimension of code-switching research operates under the assumption that switching is not a random process, but rather, a rule-governed. Where Espinosa (1917) described switching as a random intermingling of Spanish words and phrases with English words and phrases, in comparison, present day students of switching prefer to describe it as a relaxed, not

mixed, switching of codes that occurs " not because the speaker does not know the right word but because the word that comes out is more readily available at the time of production" (Lance,1969:93).

A study that took an early look at the presence of syntactic constraints in code-switching was done by Gumperz & Hernandez (1969). Essentially, they found in their analysis of Chicano code-switching the operation of certain syntactical constraints: adverbial constructions may be switched,"Vamos next week," but not as interrogatives,"When vamos?"; a switch may occur at a noun phrase, but only after a determiner,"Se lo di a mi grandfather," but not as,"Se lo di a my grandfather,"; an adverb may be switched before an adjective,"Es muy friendly," but not,"Es very amistoso." Other, more recent, and interesting, work that further examines the applicability of syntactical constraints on Chicano code-switching is that of Sanchez (1974), Pfaff (1975), Timm (1975b), Gingras (1974), and McMenamin (1973). Thus, the goal of this dimension of code-switching research is to demonstrate that switching is not merely the accidental co-occurrence of many independent variables, but that it is itself an abstract entity which ought to have a place in a sociolinguistic grammar - like a master switch which one can throw and thus control a whole series of subordinate switches.

1.1.2 Speakers' Notions of Codes

While these two dimensions of code-switching research have produced some working knowledge regarding the dimensions and meanings found to underlie the selection and switching of codes, they have fallen short of demonstrating the extent to which switching is dependent on individual social and linguistic characteristics. Because studies of code-switching assume that bilingual speakers are able to identify and keep apart codes, it is therefore also assumed that

bilingual speakers have the ability to distinguish between meaningful and non-meaningful code contrasts. But, it is by assuming that the bilingual speaker possesses these properties that causes the sociolinguist to avoid examining, in a complete manner, the sociolinguistic competence of the code-switching speaker. For example, what is the linguistic knowledge that a speaker must have to distinguish the meaningful code juxtaposition from mere random alternations or idiosyncratic alternations? Clearly if code-switching is meaningful it must be subject to some forms of linguistic regularity, and one should be able to isolate instances of switching which for linguistic reasons are not meaningful. Thus, knowledge of the relationship between the bilingual speaker's proficiency in both languages, and use and knowledge of meaningful switching would seem to be of crucial importance to sociolinguistics for the development of research programs and strategies. Perhaps in the end, one may be able to infer what the bilingual's linguistic proficiency is by examining the linguistic configurations his code-switching discourse exhibits.

1.2 Language Maintenance and Language Loyalty

To study "language maintenance" is to examine the "relationship between change (or stability) in language usage patterns ... in populations that utilize more than one speech variety for intra-group or inter-group purposes" (Fishman,1972:76). On the other hand, to study "language loyalty" is to examine the commitment of bilingual speakers to either one of the two languages as the preferred medium of communication, and as the principal definer of their sociolinguistic reality. Thus, where the former subscribes to the study of language in form, the latter examines language as form.[4]

Though it is usually suggested that Chicanos are primarily responsible for the

presence and persistence of the Spanish language in the United States (Fishman & Hofman,1966; Grebler, et.al.,1970), very few empirical studies have been conducted examining the degree, and extent, to which Chicanos are maintaining the use of the Spanish language, and the social processes either retarding or promoting such maintenance. In short, it is usually assumed that most Chicanos are bilingual, approaching native speaker ability in English only seldom, and in varying degrees, and using a variety or varieties of Mexican Spanish as the language of the home.

The persistence of Spanish within the Chicano speech community is usually said to reflect the degree of isolation of large segments of the group from interaction with the larger society; the close proximity of Mexico, and the close relations with relatives in Mexico many Chicanos maintain; the relative recency of mass migrations, thereby providing a continuous arrival of newcomers from Mexico to this country; and family pressure to retain the "old" ways of Mexico. A brief overview of the literature allows us to outline the following as principal characteristics of the Chicanos' sociolinguistic situation: (cf. Grebler, et. al.,1970; Skrabanek,1971; Dunn,1975; Patella & Kuvlesky,1973)

1. Urban households tend to use less Spanish when compared with rural households.
2. There is a tendency for Chicanos living in predominantly Chicano neighborhoods to speak inadequate English than Spanish, while Chicanos living in mixed neighborhoods exhibit less of a language handicap in English.
3. Spanish language radio is more popular than Spanish language television; and Spanish language media, in general, being most popular among the poor, women, and old people.
4. Home language usage is affected by the ethnic generation of the parents and the

influence of the extended family on the life of any given family unit.

5. An inverse relationship between the socioeconomic status of the family and use of Spanish is usually postulated.

But problems arise if the sociolinguist decides to accept these findings as a working knowledge of Chicano language usage. In the first place, the effects of urban vs rural areas upon the use of Spanish have neither been defined systematically nor refined analytically. For example, given that language shift is occurring among Chicanos, is it the product of urbanization effects? or of a lower rate of bilingualism? In this regard, it seems much more reasonable to assume that language shift is taking place among urban Chicanos, as well as rural Chicanos, but that when compared, there will be a difference due to the effects of the different socio-structural demands placed upon each type of population. This way, the sociolinguist will not be so surprised to discover that the Chicano speech community is not homogeneous in the maintenance of the Spanish language. As Thompson (1974) has demonstrated, in many cases the urban vs rural comparison is not sufficient to explain the Chicanos's maintenance of the Spanish language. One must also examine the speaker's place of birth, and the language predominantly spoken in the speaker's home before adulthood (e.g. before the age of 14), to obtain a complete sociolinguistic profile of the individual for comparative purposes.

Secondly, the differential effects of home language use vs language use with peers have not been examined in enough detail to allow the sociolinguist to assume that use of Spanish in the home is sufficient for the maintenance of Spanish outside of the home.[5] The literature is full of instances where monolingual Spanish speaking parents when speaking with their children, will be responded to in English

by the children. Sawyer (1976) recently proposed a schema for Chicano bilinguals which illustrates the possibilty, or likelihhod, for Chicanos to be reared in Spanish-speaking homes , and yet be predominantly English-speaking. If instances such as these are labeled by the sociolinguist as "sociolingustic anomalies", then one should be able to explain their presence by outlining those factors that either promote or restrain them. Thus, by studying what these anomalies "are", we will also be studying what they "are not", and perhaps by taking the latter we may be able to refine our indicators in the Chicano's maintenance of and loyalty to the Spanish language.

Finally, because many sociolinguists are also very good sociologists, they are quick to assume that a low index of usage of the Spanish language is a reliable indicator of the Chicano's acculturation to Anglo-American society.[6] But by doing this, some very important questions are overlooked: is there a difference in the speech behavior of Chicanos living in a homogeneous Chicano speech community and that of Chicanos living in a heterogeneous speech community? if differeences do exist, are they related to additional demographic variables and behavioral variables above and beyond the heterogeneity/homogeneity of the speech community? are these differences reliable indicators of the effects behavioral and demographic variables have upon the Chicano's maintenance of and loyalty to the Spanish language. By neglecting to pay attention to questions such as these, the study of language maintenance and language loyalty among Chicanos has simply become another step in the study of why the Chicano is or is not acculturating to Anglo-American society. As such, its contribution towards understanding the sociolinguistic situation of the Chicano is severly limited.

1.3 Summary

There are thus cogent and powerful reasons for the encouragement of a Chicano sociolinguistics. Seen purely from an academic perspective, sociolinguistic investigation in the Chicano community makes excellent sense: it is a large group that resides in all areas of the country, the basic varieties are easily accesible to researchers, it shares many social characteristics with other groups, and little has been done.

As we have seen in the preceding pages, there is a large body of findings regarding the language use of the Chicanos, but these have failed to take the form of a Chicano sociolinguistics for the following two reasons[7]: (a) Most studies of Chicano language usage have been done independently of each other, almost as in a vacuum. Consequently, a large body of studies has been produced that lack any theoretical connectiveness that would facilitate the outlining of a paradigm for a Chicano sociolinguistics. (b) As mentioned earlier, most language studies of the Chicano community lack commitment either to the speech community or the ideas guiding the research. Thus, this lack of commitment between researcher and the community has prevented this body of studies from completely outlining the various dimensions of language use in the Chicano community, and from producing a Chicano sociolinguistics that truly explores the Chicano's sociolinguistic situation.

In the remaining pages of this paper we will outline what we consider to be vital elements in a Chicano sociolinguistics research program.

1.4 Chicano Sociolinguistics: A Proposal

Fernando Peñalosa (1975) has suggested that Chicano sociolinguists will need to develop their own methodologies to examine language use in the Chicano

speech community. However, I think this can be taken one step further. To avoid the pitfalls of academic opportunism, Chicano sociolinguists need to take the linguistic needs of the Chicano community itself as a foundation for the development of a research program and strategy. This is not to say that all research on Chicano language should be applied research, but rather, that the areas selected for investigation match as closely as possible those areas which are of greatest concern to Chicanos themselves, that the results have the potential of being applied to practical concerns, and, very importantly, that they be made available to the communities from which the information was taken. Only in this manner will the Chicano sociolinguist avoid the research dictum, especially found in the social sciences, that practices investigations <u>on</u> people, sometimes <u>for</u> people, and almost never <u>with</u> people.

Because research questions are formulated as a consequence of individual scholarly interests or else as a result of encouragement by governmental, educational, or private agencies, issues become defined from a particular vantage point that effectively excludes the users of language. In an area like sociolinguistics, where the definition of research goals has the potential of affecting the lives of great numbers of speakers, it is neither productive with respect to the theoretical import of the questions addressed nor defensible from the point of view of the possible applications of research to exclude the group which is most directly affected. The position is frequently taken that only the scholar with his superior knowledge and training is qualified to establish the goals and methods of research, and even to specify the uses that made of the results. The non-scholar, the ordinary person, is seen as not having the necessary knowledge or expertise.

The predictable result is the identification of sociolinguistic "problems"

and the recommendation of "solutions" that are based on a particular set of assumptions and perspectives which may or may not contribute towards understanding the speakers' sociolinguistic reality. In short, the establishment of goals, independently of the users of language, risks the imposition on members of language communities of a set of values determined by non-member intellectuals and the consequent invalidation of those goals. The academic cannot proceed with his research program without the special knowledge of members of the group to be studied and their unique perceptions of the conditions in which they live. And if a proposed research program is to address itself to the practical needs of the population being studied, those perceptions must be linked to the scholar's specialized training. Consequently, to insure a Chicano sociolinguistics research program which is both meaningful to people and non-exploitive, a cooperative effort between the academic and Chicano non-academic community must therefore be a fundamental principle in planning a program of research that will both address the practical needs of Chicanos and achieve the intellectual aims of the scholar.

A cooperative approach is thus indispensible for the development of a Chicano sociolinguistics. It is important for us to know how Chicanos perceive their linguistic situation; whether they identify themselves as a speech community, and if so, how; what language issues are of importance to them, and what are their linguistic aspirations. For instance, are some research methodologies more tolerable or more effective than others from the point of view of the Chicano community? It is crucial for us to know whether the inclusion of the subjects of sociolinguistic study in the identification of the goals and methods of research, and in the definition of issues and directions for language planning can lead to more insightful formulations of questions that are pertinent to sociolinguistic theory.

The principal goal of a Chicano sociolinguistics research program should therefore be to explore the consequences of involving the users of language in the scholarly process, not only as the objects of research and planning but as participants in those aspects of activities that are normally considered to lie within the province of the trained professional. If we wish to understand how Chicanos identify themselves and others as members of a speech community, how they perceive their linguistic situation, in what ways their definitions of important issues differ from those of the authorities, what values they hold with respect to research, and what kinds of solutions they envision for sociolinguistic problems, then we must be willing to allow the Chicano community member and speaker to define his sociolinguistic reality for us before we attempt to interpret and define his sociolinguistic situation.

Footnotes

1. Since 1967, the term Chicano, traditionally an in-group word used by particular groups of Spanish speakers, has increasingly come to be applied indiscriminantly to all persons of hispano-mexicano ancestry residing in the U.S. The use of this designation by the media, government officials, and scholars implies the identification of a diverse group of people as a single (speech) community. In between are the self-designations of the people - Chicanos, Tejanos, Hispanos, Manitos, Pachucos, etc. One of the first tasks of the sociolinguist should therefore be to examine the correspondence of these identifications to those of the sociologist or linguist, and what the importance of the discrepencies is: in what way do these categories correspond to linguistic dimensions? are these categorizations of self and of others important to the understanding of what are relevant speech communities?
2. A new dimension of Chicano sociolinguistic research, in the footsteps of Lambert, having to do with attitudes toward Chicano speech is "taking form". We say it is "taking form" because the implications it might have for sociolinguistic theory have not been clearly formulated. For some studies representative of this dimension see the following: Arthur, et. al.,1974, Flores & Hopper,1975, Carranza & Ryan,1975, Ryan,1973, Cohen,1974.
3. An interesting paper that illustrates how code-switching may be used as a verbal strategy within a bilingual classroom is the one by Jacobson,1976.
4. In social acts, form is content. To study "language in form" is to study language

in its context; whereas, to study "language as form" is to examine the context in which language occurs (see Duncan,1962:315-325).

5. Specific studies that bring into play the peer group vs family language usage are: Patella & Kuvlesky,1973; Nall,1962.

6. This of course also assumes the converse that a high index of usage of the Spanish language serves as a reliable indicator of the Chicano's commitment to Chicano socio-cultural values (for an example, see Garcia, et.al.,1974). This assumption is further reinforced by the argument that the increasing political awareness of the Chicano adolescent has caused the maintenance of and loyalty to the Spanish language to increase, (cf. Ayer,1971). For criticism of this assumption see: Patella (1971), Patella & Kuvlesky (1975), Kuvlesky & Patella (1970).

7. In general, we agree with Ornstein's (1974:91) suggestion that Chicano sociolinguistics has failed to take form because "people today think of sociolinguistics either as studies on Black inner-city speech or on remote ethnic groups quite distinct from our own scene ..." A recent attempt to strighten the situation is the publication of a long awaited volume by Hernandez-Chavez, et.al.,(1975). A collection of essays that attempts to describe the various dimensions surrounding the Chicano's sociolinguistic situation.

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